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CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY

An Address by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. Paul Martin, at the closing dinner of the CANADA-UNITED STATES CONFERENCE, University of Rochester, N.Y., September 1, 1955.

It was with much pleasure that I accepted the kind invitation of President de Kiewiet to represent Canada and the Canadian Government in this distinguished gathering and to offer a few observations on Canadian foreign policy. I have come here from New York where our foreign policy is being put to a practical test in the meetings of the Subcommittee of the Disarmament Commission which has convened at the recommendation of the President of the United States and the other Heads of State attending the recent Geneva talks.

May I, first of all, express my great pleasure at again visiting the city of Rochester and this University. Three years ago I had the privilege of being one of the first few Canadians to take part in these forums when I discussed some of Canada's experiments in social legislation.

For some years, Rochester has been associated in the minds of most Canadians with medicine and with music, but today our people are becoming increasingly aware that Rochester is developing into an outstanding centre of studies on Canadian affairs. We in Canada have welcomed your initiative in establishing, in this great University, a specialized programme of Canadian Studies; and I may add that we are particularly gratified that its direction has been entrusted to a man of Mr. Mason Wade's evident talents. The Government of Canada regards this project as a matter of the greatest importance and I can assure you that we shall give you all the co-operation and all the help at our disposal to aid in furthering this imaginative undertaking which is but one further example of your friendly and neighbourly interest in our affairs.

In the discussions of the past two days on "The Bases of United States and Canadian Foreign Policies", you have considered the manner in which foreign policy is planned, the procedures for carrying it through Congress or Parliament, and of finding support for it in public opinion. You will naturally expect from me some account of Canadian views and attitudes on these matters.

In considering Canada's external relations, we should remember, of course, that a nation's long-term policy in international affairs must inevitably be closely bound up with its own domestic life. This was recognized more than thirty years ago by our late Prime Minister, the Right Honourable W.L. Mackenzie King, when he made this significant observation at the Imperial Conference of 1923.

"Foreign policy I conceive as simply the sum of dealings or relationships or policies which the government of the country carries on with other countries. It is in large part an extension of domestic policy. It depends upon the balance of social and political forces, upon the industrial organization, upon the whole background of the people's life."

This means, then, that if a nation is founded on a tradition of freedom -- as the United States and Canada are -- and if its internal affairs are managed according to democratic processes, respect for the rights and freedoms of others is likely to be carried over into its international dealings. For this reason, the respect and influence of any one country on the broad world scene will be measured, in part, by its success in managing its own affairs. By the same token, a nation that follows a dictatorial form of government will bring an authoritarian approach to its relations with other nations.

An important development for Canada over the past two decades has been our greatly increased stature among the nations. Our voice is heard with respect at the United Nations and at world conferences dealing with problems in many fields. Three years ago, our distinguished Secretary of State for External Affairs, my colleague the Hon. L.B. Pearson, was elected to the high office of President of the seventh General Assembly of the United Nations. On frequent occasions, as in the disarmament talks of last autumn, Canada has been called upon to play the role of mediator in delicate negotiations on vital matters. This I regard as a tribute to the skill and competence of the men and women who comprise our foreign service.

It would, of course, be idle to pretend that Canada, like other countries in the free world, has succeeded in constantly keeping the initiative in planning much of its foreign policy during these disturbing years since the Second Great war ended and the second little peace began. We have, as you know, rarely been in a position to take the initiative and we have, throughout these years, been very largely on the defensive.

In consequence, our foreign policy has been what I might call responsive; just as when, in playing hockey, with two or three of the Canadian team in the penalty box -- a phenomenon which does, on occasion, arise -- we are constrained to play a purely defensive role rather than an aggressive one in which we can use our full forces of strength and initiative.

Perhaps our most successful joint venture in international affairs and certainly the one most familiar to the public has been the establishment and the strengthening of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This, of course, we, with our friends and partners in the North Atlantic

community, undertook as a purely defensive measure in its military aspects, but already in planning it, and later in developing it, we found that it meant more to all of us -- a political, economic and social community of interests between like-minded people.

It may be said, then, that we did take an important initiative in forming this voluntary defensive alliance, but, in general, our foreign policies since the last war have been essentially responsive. This makes it difficult to discuss accurately and realistically the manner in which our foreign policies are planned since so frequently they have been shaped to deal with aggression or the menace of it against ourselves and our friends.

In the second place, I think it would be highly misleading to attempt to explain the development of foreign policy in Canada by saying that the Government plans a foreign policy, proceeds to secure parliamentary approval for it, and then finally seeks to find support for it in public opinion.

It is true that, on occasion -- because of rapidly-changing circumstances -- we of the Government must take swift action which seems to us wise and reasonable, and then justify our actions before the bar of Canadian public opinion. Normally, however, it is our endeavour that governmental and parliamentary action in foreign affairs should express the as yet unformulated wiser opinion of Canadians generally on a particular issue and thus keep pace with public opinion. If, as occasionally happens, a military band gets a block or two ahead of the regiment attempting to keep up with it, the contact is lost. The band may still be admired by passers-by, but it no longer serves any useful function.

In the strict legal position the conduct of Canada's foreign affairs is essentially a matter that flows from the Royal Prerogative, the historic and traditional power of the Crown in such matters as the making of peace and war, the recognition of states and governments, and so on. However, action in the field of foreign affairs is taken less and less in the name of the Queen and more and more in the name of the Government or a member of the Government. Nevertheless, as a member nation of the Commonwealth, the authority possessed by the executive arm of the Government in Canada derives from the ancient prerogative of the Crown.

While policy decisions on foreign affairs are made by the Cabinet, under our system of responsible government, Parliament is entitled to be kept fully informed and, in the final analysis, has complete control over executive authority. Nearly thirty years ago, in 1926, Parliament adopted a resolution which required prior parliamentary approval before the Cabinet could ratify a treaty or convention affecting Canada or "signify acceptance of any treaty, convention or agreement involving military or economic sanctions".

In this connection, Prime Minister King made this declaration two years later:

"I submit that the day has passed when any government or executive should feel that they should take it upon themselves, without

the approval of Parliament, to commit a country to obligations involving any considerable financial outlays or active undertakings.

"In all cases where obligations of such a character are being assumed internationally, Parliament itself should be assured of having the full right of approving what is done before binding commitments are made. I would not confine Parliamentary approval only to those matters which involve military sanctions and the like. I feel Parliamentary approval should apply where there are involved matters of large expenditure or political considerations of a far-reaching character."

It is important, of course, to recognize the distinction between "policy" and "negotiation". Parliamentary control must not be so rigid that it destroys the flexibility and freedom of action that may be frequently necessary in confidential negotiations. Principles and policies should be discussed in Parliament and conclusions reached by the Government should be submitted for parliamentary approval, but the execution of the policies agreed upon -- whether it is called "diplomacy" or "negotiation" is quite another matter.

As Harold Nicholson has put it: "Once an electorate fully understand that they are safeguarded against secret policy, they may not worry themselves so acutely over the imaginary terrors of secret negotiation."

In maintaining popular control over foreign policy, we have one great asset in Canada -- a remarkably alert and vigorous Press, which is not at all reluctant about pointing out to the Government what it considers to be its shortcomings, whether in being too venturesome or too indolent. We have also a large and articulate body of commentators on public affairs -- many of them in Canadian universities -- who are quite capable of pointing out, in no uncertain terms, the defects of governmental action or the lack of it. We have, too, I am glad to say, an Opposition in Parliament which rarely fails to seize upon an opportunity to remind the Government of its shortcomings.

What, then, I am suggesting to you is simply that the formation and the implementing of foreign policy in Canada is not a prefabricated job which goes on in secret and then is sold to the Canadian public by various devices. There is, on the contrary, a constant interplay, with the Government and Parliament, the Canadian press and Canadian public opinion continually taking part in these momentous affairs. And it would be difficult indeed to suggest the precise province of any one of these controlling or creative factors.

I understand that, last year, the general theme of the discussions which were carried on at this Rochester meeting was "The Economic Interdependence of Canada and the United States". I believe that, among other things, it was clearly established that between 1939 and 1954 there had occurred, in Canada, nothing less than an economic revolution. Since 1939, and more particularly since the

end of the War, the Canadian economy has enormously expanded, and this expansion is still continuing -- towards what limits we hardly venture to predict.

It might now be noted that there has been an equally great transformation in Canadian foreign policy, though, of course, this cannot be so readily measured, nor so quantitatively demonstrated, except perhaps in the vast increase in our representation abroad and our financial commitments to the United Nations and its affiliated agencies and to NATO.

What I have in mind is this: at the Peace of Versailles, Canada insisted, somewhat strongly, upon signing the Treaty in her own name and became a Charter Member of the League of Nations. This was our entry on the world stage. A little later we signed a Treaty with the United States, in 1923 to be precise, on Halibut Fisheries -- the first Treaty to be signed by Canada as a sovereign power in her own right. Looking at it from the perspective of 1955, I think it is true that our original membership in the League of Nations did not so much show a recognition in Canada that we were prepared to take on grave international responsibilities, but was rather more a symptom of our own self-consciousness and of our desire to make a gesture of our independence, which had not hitherto been formally proclaimed or recognized.

In general, I think it is true and perhaps safe to say now, thirty years later, that during the twenties and middle thirties, we in Canada -- and we were in good company -- were somewhat timorous of committing ourselves to any responsibilities which would engage us beyond our own country. There were many reasonable explanations, compelling ones, in fact, for our attitude. Be that as it may, it nevertheless remains that, although a Charter Member of the League of Nations, we made it clear, particularly on one memorable occasion, that Canada could not assume obligations to participate in such military or economic sanctions as the League of Nations might decide to impose.

Our population in Canada is, in many respects, similar to that of the United States. It is a mosaic, composed essentially of people or their descendants who fled from difficult or even intolerable conditions in the old world. Most of us, I think, in Canada, during the twenties and thirties, wanted nothing more than to be left alone, and we were inclined to agree with the late Prime Minister of Canada that it was intolerable that Canada should be engaged, once each generation, in the quarrels of Europe which, we thought, were none of our business. They were, as was shown again in the Second World War.

We have come a long way since, and hence I venture to suggest that the transformation in our foreign policies has been just as striking as anything which has occurred in our economy. The two, of course, are closely related and we have come to realize that our country, as an important middle power, must accept the international responsibilities which stem from our power and our interests in world affairs. International commerce is a good example.

We have, indeed, come so far that the commitments which we have voluntarily accepted -- in the past decade particularly -- would be unthinkable to Canadians, let us say, of thirty years ago. We have, with many other countries

of the world, come to realize that a policy of no commitment offers very little security. In consequence, along with so many other great and medium and small powers, we accepted under the United Nations' Charter certain very precise commitments for a system of collective security.

Our expectations in 1945 and 1946 have been disappointed and, as a result, along with other members of the Atlantic community, we have been compelled to take on further substantial commitments under the terms of the North Atlantic Treaty. It may be permissible to recall that, in 1947, it was our present Prime Minister who, as Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs, suggested, in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, that more precise obligations for collective security than those proposed by the Charter of the United Nations might be adopted by those countries who would be prepared to accept them. This proposal was one of the sources of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

At the present time there is no reasonable body of Canadian opinion which questions our maintaining substantial forces, which include a well-armed Air Division in Europe and an Infantry Brigade in Germany. Although in Canada our taxes are quite severe, there is no serious opposition to the thesis that we should contribute what we can and what we must to international security. We have, as I indicated earlier, come a long way from our somewhat reluctant and parochial point of view of the twenties and of the early thirties. Let me provide a simple illustration.

Towards the end of last January, on the conclusion of the debate on the resolution to approve the protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the accession of the Federal Republic of Germany -- perhaps the most important debate on international affairs in the Parliament of Canada since the war -- the resolution was approved by 213 votes to 12. I would remind you that this long and grave debate in the Canadian House was not merely upon the immediate issue -- the accession of Germany to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization -- but on the fundamental point of full acceptance by Canada of the responsibilities involved in being a member country of NATO. We have every reason to believe that the approval of the resolution in our House of Commons by an overwhelming majority reflects pretty accurately the sentiments of the Canadian people as a whole.

They, like their Government, wish that defence expenditures could be reduced, and that Canadian resources could be directed to more constructive purposes. They are not prepared, however, to lower their guard, and shun their responsibilities, unless and until their security which is interdependent with that of their friends, is assured, in freedom, by other means. There are, of course, well-defined limits to what a nation like Canada can undertake and we do not propose to undertake obligations which we shall be unable or unwilling to fulfil.

In this company of friends and neighbours, I think I might define three factors which affect profoundly -- and which indeed condition -- our attitude in international affairs. These three factors are:

- (1) National unity
- (2) International trade
- (3) Canadian geography and population.

I should like to speak briefly on each of these three points in turn.

(1) Canadian unity and international affairs

It is, I suppose, axiomatic that no nation can embark upon foreign policies which do not receive the acceptance of the great majority of its people. This acceptance, of course, can be given under many degrees of compulsion in countries where democratic freedoms are limited or even non-existent. Our Canadian community, partly as a consequence of the last war, has become increasingly well-knit and we are proceeding with some success towards the development of a genuine Canadian community spirit, without, we hope, falling into the errors of excessive nationalism. We are fortunate, too, in having in Canada an unusually stable government.

But in spite of these two factors it must not be assumed that the Government of Canada could advocate or embark upon foreign policies which were not acceptable to the great majority of the Canadian people. Indeed, for many years before this last war the guiding principle in the formulation of our foreign policy was the maintenance of the unity of Canada as a nation. For example, at the time of the Rhineland crisis in 1936, the then Prime Minister said: "I believe that Canada's first duty to the League and to the British Empire with respect to all great issues that come up is, if possible, to keep this country united".

Although, as I have indicated, we have developed in our attitudes on matters of foreign policy from those which we held in the 20's and in the 30's, it would be very wrong to judge that this fundamental policy has become entirely obsolete. If it is true that since the war we in Canada have been able to adopt a more positive policy in international affairs and to accept earnestly and seriously the grave commitments which we have undertaken, this has been due, in large measure, to the fact that we are now a much more united people than we were 20 years ago and that we have received during the recent war and its aftermath a stiff post-graduate course in international affairs.

In consequence, most Canadians now agree that the factors in Canadian life which tend to separate us, and which in themselves stem from genuine and honest differences of opinion, cannot be allowed to so separate us in Canada that we could take no effective action if our own country and the free world were threatened by forces seeking to destroy all that we consider essential to our civilization.

In Canada we have developed, as indeed you have and also others of our allies, a bi-partisan or rather a non-partisan attitude towards international affairs, apart from the voices of a very small minority -- and such a minority is always characteristic of a democracy in good working order. But we cannot take our national unity for granted, nor could any Canadian government venture upon

political projects in the international sphere that could shatter the essential unity of our country which has been so long in the making.

(2) Canada's external policies and Canadian international trade

We have in Canada only three-fifths of one per cent of the total world population. But with this modest force we produce enough wheat for 90,000,000 people; we produce 90 per cent of the world's nickel and 60 per cent of the world's newsprint; and before long we shall be producing 50 per cent of the world's aluminum. In consequence, we have a heavy dependence on international trade. If our present standard of living is to be maintained and modestly increased over the years we must sell abroad about 33 per cent of everything we produce -- and in certain of our commodities such as nickel, newsprint and asbestos, practically 100 per cent. In the United States, although foreign trade is important, it is not as vital as it is to us since normally, I believe, you do not export more than eight or nine per cent of your total annual production.

Moreover, our two economies are so closely intertwined that we are naturally deeply concerned -- and in my view legitimately concerned -- with your policies, whether in foreign affairs or in international commerce. These matters are, of course, your own affairs and these you must decide, as do we, in what you consider to be the essential interests of your country. I might perhaps suggest, however, that we in Canada would on occasion be happier to have somewhat longer advance notice of your intentions since a relatively minor shift in your trade policies can be extremely serious or even disastrous to certain parts of our national economy.

At the present time, for example, almost 70 per cent of everything we export from Canada goes to the United States, and if this country looks to Canada as its major source of nickel, newsprint, asbestos and so on, we look to the United States as our major outlet. The continuance of Canadian prosperity is therefore very largely dependent -- and to some of us alarmingly so -- upon your capacity and your willingness to absorb a very great percentage of these and of other commodities which we have now the means to produce. In brief, a relatively minor recession in your prosperity or what might seem to you to be an insignificant change in your tariff structure can have grave consequences for your neighbour to the north. We trust, therefore, that in forming policies and in putting them into effect you will continue to be mindful of how very close we are to each other and how deeply interdependent.

(3) External policies and Canadian geography and population

We in Canada are somewhat afflicted by too much geography. We inhabit an area larger than that of the United States and we have less than one-tenth of your population, of which about two-thirds lives within 100 miles of your northern boundary. We have also become increasingly aware of the sober fact that we lie on the direct route between you and potential forces of aggression and that in any future conflict we would be as much on the invasion route as, let us say, Belgium was in European wars over the last two or three centuries.

Because then of our geography, of our limited population, and of our very great resources, we cannot be unconcerned with, because we could not remain aloof from, any important disturbance of the peace anywhere in the world. This sobering realization has created in Canada a new and, in a sense, revolutionary attitude towards the world at large and to our daily process of living. It may, indeed, be that there is no country in the world so conscious as Canada of the close connection between international organization and security and our own national interests, whether in commercial affairs or in the immediate problem of security.

With our population, with our problems of distance and with our concern in hastening the economic development of half an enormous continent, we find it difficult to accept seriously any accusation that we are a war-mongering people. At the present time we are indeed spending about 40 per cent of our national annual budget on defence measures. This we accept as a necessity, and in view of the times in which we live we do this ungrudgingly; but we would be enormously relieved, as would all peaceful peoples, if we could devote a much larger proportion of our productivity and of our savings to our great problems of transportation, communications, housing, health, social welfare and national development.

A further word about our people.. We have in Canada a medley of peoples from most of the countries of western Europe. It is sometimes forgotten in the United States that less than one-half of the total population of Canada has any ethnic connection with the British Isles. More than 30 per cent of our population is of French origin and we have important minorities of German, Dutch, Polish, Russian, Ukranian, Italian and other origins. Since the end of the Second World War we have received into Canada more than 1,100,000 immigrants from western Europe so that at the present time about one-twelfth of our total population is composed of persons who have come to Canada since 1946, and we are prepared to receive more.

We are in Canada not particularly skilled in the art of propoganda but it seems clear to me that the direction in which refugees from terror and despair and injustice have turned, over these last few years, is important. They turn towards us in the west and I do not recall that we have -- any more than you have -- many refugees who flee towards the security of the Iron Curtain countries, although they are at complete liberty to go, and to take their possessions with them.

These three points are perhaps the principal internal factors which Canada must consider in framing and in implementing its foreign policy. There are, of course, other influences -- external influences -- which most profoundly shape our policies and our actions. Among these are our relations with other members of the United Nations, our somewhat closer partnership with our allies and friends of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and with our friends and associates in the Commonwealth, and finally, of course, the very special relationship which we enjoy with our good neighbour the United States which has now assumed, with ever-growing confidence, the leadership of the free world.

It is difficult for me to imagine a situation in which the projection of Canadian interests abroad could conflict in any serious way with the interests of our allies in NATO and, more particularly, with the fundamental interests of the United States. This does not, of course, imply that invariably and in all matters can the United States count upon the automatic agreement of my country, nor does it imply either that we are content or shall be content to accept without comment important decisions on matters in which we have not been consulted. We feel pretty strongly that discussion and consultation, far from being barriers to effective action, are essential if a coalition is to be able to take any effective action whatsoever.

The student of international affairs will find in his examination of Canadian foreign policies no very great complexities. Our emergence as an important middle power over the last few years has perhaps left us a little self-conscious and a little breathless, and our experience in two successive generations of world wars and of the grim aftermath of the last war have exercised a profound change, as I have suggested earlier, upon the attitude of Canadians towards the rest of the world. We have also a number of somewhat special problems, which I have outlined, as an obvious consequence of our geographical position and of our international trading activities.

Although we may have once thought that we could work out our own salvation without much reference to the rest of the world, I can assure you that we no longer nurture this illusion. We have accepted grave international commitments which we take with the utmost seriousness. But we have also important domestic responsibilities and we wish profoundly that we could get on with the job without the interruptions and the heavy costs of ensuring that a way of life which seems good to us is not seriously menaced or destroyed. All Canadians have been heartened by what may be the pale dawning of a new era when, increasingly, international conferences will be organized to promote the welfare of man and not merely to arrange temporary measures to delay his destruction. Whether then, to maintain with our allies the things which we cherish or to co-operate in efforts to achieve a richer and more peaceful life, I know that I speak for my fellow Canadians when I say that we are ready and willing to assume our full measure of responsibility in mankind's search for security and peace in the world.
